

# Homes Michiana

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## For the love of the

■ Housing development offers kayaking, skiing and more.

By **GENE STOWE**  
Tribune Correspondent

**T**he 90-minute commute from Chicago's western suburbs to Buchanan's western suburb, Maple Beach, is becoming a well-worn path as city folks flock to the former campground.

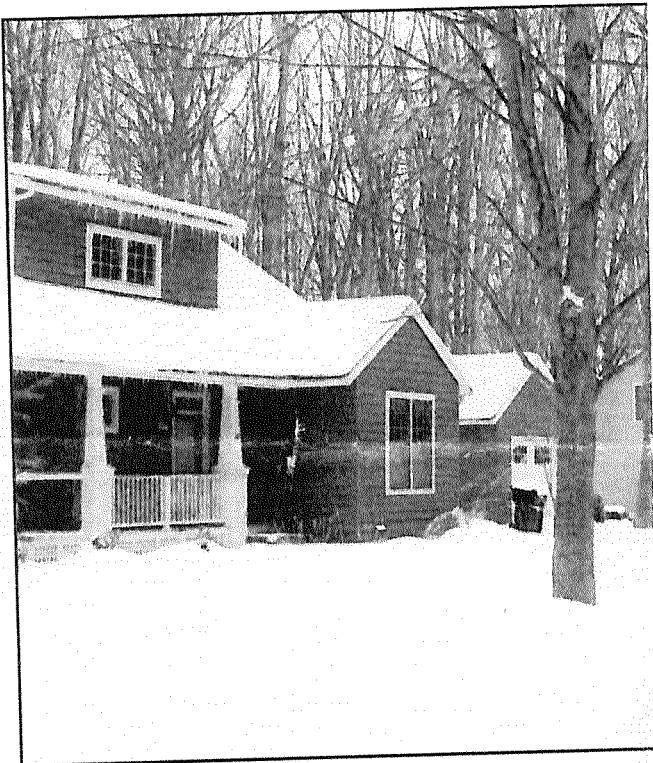
Sue and Larry Chilton started the trend, landing in Maple Beach seven years ago after a dozen-year search for a quiet canoe-and-kayak lake plus cross-country skiing.

"We were the first ones in there," Sue says, adding that both people she knew and new friends from her area have shown up since. "There seems to be a big draw from the western suburbs. Our neighbors fell in love with it, and they bought a cottage, too. My sister bought a place.

"Everybody else was kind of serendipitous. You get there and there's a magic about the place."

Developer Megan VanVlierbergan started Maple Beach in 2004 on a 60-acre one-time Boy Scout campground that had become the public Three Braves Campground with sites for campers and more rustic camping.

She finished selling the lots around Wagner Lake in 2006 and went on to start the nearby Orchard on the Lake. Houses that have sold recently in



The Maple Beach subdivision of summer homes is the for west of Buchanan.

### Our Neighborhoods



Stories about Michiana neighborhoods

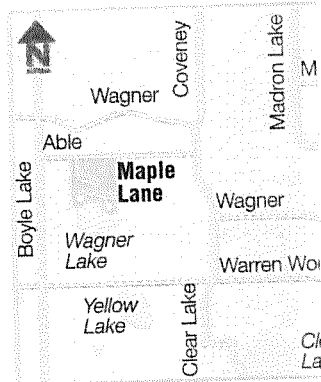
Maple Beach ([www.maplebeach.net](http://www.maplebeach.net)) are in the \$450,000 range, but the feel of the 22 homes still reflects the rural land's heritage.

"I put those closer together and it has turned out to be 'campy living,'" Megan says. "They all have bonfires down at the beach at night, softball games. I think it's an extension of its old campground days."

The cottage-style homes, 2,100 to 2,600 square feet, have wide plank hardwood floors and stone-chimney

### Maple Beach

Maple Beach consists of 22 cottage-style homes on Wagner west of Buchanan, at a one-time Scout campground.



fireplaces.

"Primarily these are second home residents,"

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# the great outdoors



Tribune Photo/BARBARA ALLISON

**mer Three Braves Campground at Wagner Lake, just**

fed boat on big lake: "The water is crystal-clear."

She and Larry sometimes make a day trip to the second home for cross-country skiing and dinner out.

"In the summer, we're up there at least every other weekend," she says. "In the winter, we try to get up at least once a month to ski. Our family has taken to doing the holidays up there - Thanksgiving, Christmas."

Fellow homeowners, ranging from great-grandparents to a family that recently had a new baby, enjoy get-togethers. One neighbor hosts a Cinco de Mayo party. A 12-year-old leads a Hawaiian luau.

"We have a lot of great traditions already established," says Scott, including a softball game after the homeowners' meeting in May. "There always seems to be a happy hour gathering on Sunday at the pool. There's a fire pit and everybody seems to meet by the lake."

"It's just a wonderful sense of community," Sue says. "We get together. We decorate the Thanksgiving weekend. All of us do this big chili cook-off and decorate."

The Chiltons, who chose a lot where Megan had already started a foundation for her model home and sales office, enjoys the blended diversity of both home styles and neighbors.

"The houses are all unique, just like people, but they all blend together well," Sue says. "There seems to be a fairly like-minded mentality up there. It's friends we didn't know we had until we moved in."

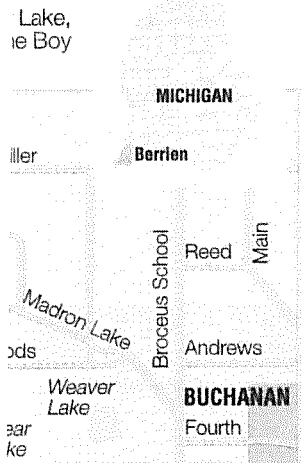
well used throughout the year," unlike the days when the campground operated only in summer.

Courtney Maesel, who works at the University of Notre Dame, and her husband Scott, who owns a commercial real estate firm in Chicago, spend more time than most at Maple Beach. They got engaged at the house five years ago.

"Obviously, the house has a lot of special meaning for us," Scott says. "For the first year or so, we didn't even have a TV. We didn't have good cell phone reception. We felt like we were in Montana. It's another world."

Sue says residents enjoy walks in the woods and quiet rides on the spring-

### Area of detail



Tribune Graphic/JOHN STUMP

Megan says. "A lot of them come up for the entire summer. The houses are